

Opinion

Unified front essential on future of I-17

Verde Independent

6/6/2007

Verde Valley leaders did not win any friends with the Arizona Department of Transportation last year while trying to forge a cooperative plan on improvements to Arizona 260.

They now have a chance to save face with ADOT by presenting a united front and offering some progressive thinking concerning the future of Interstate 17 north from Phoenix to Flagstaff.

ADOT officials met with local leaders and residents last week to lay the groundwork for not only a new and improved I-17, but also future alternative routes for the freeway.

Anyone who lives in this part of Arizona can tell you the main shortcoming of I-17 between Flagstaff and Phoenix is the insufficient number of lanes. This is especially obvious any time there is an accident on the interstate and traffic is brought to a standstill and backed up for 50 miles.

Fortunately, there is some partial good news to report in this regard. Already, ADOT plans to add one general-purpose lane in each direction of I-17 starting at the Carefree Highway and continuing north to Anthem. That work is scheduled to be completed by the end of 2009. Future improvements within the next 10-15 years include carpool lanes going south from Anthem and additional lanes on I-17 going north from Anthem to New River.

ADOT obviously needs to hear a consolidated political voice from the Verde Valley and Flagstaff that such widening of I-17 needs to continue well beyond Anthem and New River.

Beyond that, local leaders need to present a unified voice about alternative offshoot routes connecting I-17 to Interstate 40. One obvious consideration for such a thoroughfare would pass by the Prescott area and ease the pressure on the overburdened Arizona 69. Another would direct traffic to I-40 east of Flagstaff.

If we learned anything from last year's Cottonwood-Camp Verde 260 stalemate, it's that Northern Arizona is not going to get the time of day from ADOT if our message is fragmented and conflicting.

We need to all be on the same page, Flagstaff, Prescott and the Verde Valley.